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Viewing cable 07ATHENS685, MY WAY: GREECE AND NATO TRANSFORMATION

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07ATHENS685	2007-04-04 14:01	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Athens

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 000685

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/28/2017
TAGS: [NATO](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: MY WAY: GREECE AND NATO TRANSFORMATION

REF: A. ATHENS 216
[1](#)B. ATHENS 550

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CHARLES RIES. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Greece's fulfillment of its commitment to the NATO Alliance in terms of defense transformation has been, at best, mixed. Greece has taken some steps to reform its military doctrine and strategic and tactical thinking. It also has introduced some new institutions and procured new systems. But, overall, Greece's focus remains on traditional regional threats and, hence, traditional strategy and tactics. A number of factors account for Greece's transformation tardiness: budget constraints, the Greek public's reflexive anti-Americanism -- and by extension, anti-NATO feeling -- and the traditional obsession with the Turkish "threat." Our challenge remains getting the Greeks to look beyond their immediate neighborhood and to recognize their own interests in NATO's broader strategic agenda. END SUMMARY.

WHAT GREECE HAS DONE ...

¶2. (C) NATO has identified transformation of forces, capabilities, and doctrine as critical for the Alliance in the 21st Century. According to the Riga Summit Declaration of November 29, 2006, defense transformation "is essential to ensure that the Alliance remains able to perform its full range of missions." The Greek foreign policy establishment and military officially support transformation -- though it is usually referred to in Greece as "evolution," emphasizing a more gradual and somewhat less comprehensive concept of the adaptation of forces. Greek military planning and strategy documents emphasize the fundamentally new character of warfare in the 21st Century, the significance of new "asymmetrical threats," and the importance of adapting forces and strategy to meet these new challenges. Hellenic General Staff Defense Policy Director Brigadier General Aleksandros Tsigaras told us the Greek military supports transformation

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and insisted that it was doing all it could, given Greece's unique defense requirements and political and budgetary capacities.

¶3. (C) Tsigaras pointed to a number of specific examples where Greece was making contributions to NATO transformation. One was the new deployable headquarters for a NATO division or corps that Greece had set up and positioned in Thessaloniki, to which many other allies had contributed. Another was the NATO Maritime Interdiction Operations Training Center (NMIOTC) Greece had established at Souda Bay on Crete to train NATO personnel for exercises such as Operation Active Endeavor. Greece had donated patrol boats to Georgia to help that country meet its Intensified Dialogue goals of border security. At home, the Hellenic General Staff had established an "Evolution Center" to plan and oversee the Greek military's increased interoperability and NATO transformation.

¶4. (C) In addition to the contributions Tsigaras noted, Greece has consolidated its rapid reaction forces under its 2nd corps in Veria in northern Greece, established a broadband communications satellite link with cartographic work stations to permit mapping of remote locations, and acquired a well-drilling and reverse-osmosis water purification system for use in distant locations without regular water supplies. Greece has also made modest contributions to NATO operations in Afghanistan (ref a) and the Balkans.

...AND HASN'T DONE

¶5. (C) These efforts notwithstanding, Greece remains far from achieving the transformational goals outlined by NATO. Its military doctrine -- a new version of which was recently announced -- continues to emphasize conventional warfare and deterrence of the Turkish "threat." Greece's military procurement system remains focused, at best, on traditional weapons systems, such as F-16 fighters and heavy armor. At

worst, it focuses on buying incompatible and/or un-needed weapons systems to score political points with European governments. And while Greece has made modest contributions to NATO's new missions -- the most critical being Afghanistan -- its forces are hamstrung by caveats.

BUDGET WOES

16. (C) There are a number of reasons why Greece has trouble with transformation. One is budget constraints. Greece traditionally has maintained relatively high levels of defense spending, higher as a proportion of GDP than the EU or NATO averages. But more recently such outlays have become unsustainable, and the New Democracy government has made reductions a priority, with spending as a percentage of GDP going from about 4.4 in 2005 to 3.5 in 2006 and targeted to be under three percent in 2007. In such a fiscal environment, the GoG has had to focus not on procurement of new, more modern -- and potentially transformational -- systems but on meeting obligations for systems incurred in the past. As editor of the defense monthly "Amyntika Themata" Spyros Papageorgacopoulos told us, "despite all the talk about procuring new systems, they are now only paying their bills."

ANTI-AMERICAN DIALECTICS

17. (C) Another reason Greece drags its transformational feet is the sometimes vague, sometimes pointed anti-Americanism -- and by extension, anti-NATO feeling -- that permeates much of the Greek polity. A lengthy and lively discussion with several defense analysts revealed various facets of this phenomenon. Zacharias Michas, chief editor of "Geostrategy," said much of the Greek public has a knee-jerk reaction against NATO expressed in slogans such as "NATO has never helped Greece," "NATO is not good for peace," and "NATO can hurt stability in the region." (NOTE: Cancellation of NATO's participation in the February 27 military exercise at Agios Efstratios following Turkish assertions of the island's "de-militarized" status (ref b) was taken by many Greeks as confirmation of their preconceptions about the Alliance. END NOTE.) At the same time, Michas noted, Greeks got very upset when Bulgaria and Romania entered the Alliance because that ended the Greek monopoly on Balkan NATO membership. Pericles Zorzovilis, correspondent for "Defense News," agreed on the contradictory views many Greeks have about the Alliance. While many disliked NATO's policies, they recognized its value for meeting the pressing military needs of the country. Maintaining a standing army of 140,000, Zorzovilis argued, imposed an enormous financial cost, which the Greek budget could not sustain without outside help.

18. (C) In such a paradoxical environment, the GoG has found it difficult to commit itself fully to NATO. Greek governments, Michas argued, had developed a defensive tactic vis-a-vis evolving NATO initiatives that he described as "katenatsio," an Italian term for a tight zone defense in soccer. Defense analyst Konstantinos Grivas said Greek governments always "play against the clock," trying to postpone major decisions on Alliance matters or on assuming greater responsibilities within the context of collective action. It was this reluctance to get involved, the analysts agreed, that kept Greece from deploying more troops to Afghanistan or allowing the Greek troops already there to leave their protected bases. As for transformation, Greece embraced the NATO Response Force (NRF) and the concept of reorganizing rapid deployment forces to add greater flexibility to existing mission profiles. But beyond these concepts, Zorzovilis noted, Greek politicians just could not bring themselves to commit. Ever fearful of the impact of new initiatives, Michas argued, Greek politicians worried that transformation would spell changes that would hurt Greek interests and negatively influence hard-fought domestic political and military balances.

THE OBSESSION WITH TURKEY

¶9. (C) The third and perhaps most important factor shaping Greek policy on NATO transformation is the 900-pound gorilla of Greek politics -- the obsession with Turkey. It permeates practically all aspects of Greek politics and, especially, military policy. Former DefMin Spilios Spiliotopoulos, whose views undoubtedly reflect the attitude of much of the Greek military, said that at the heart of the current problems with Turkey was Ankara's consistent refusal to act according to the letter and spirit of international law and treaties. For Spiliotopoulos, the Turks were constantly pushing the envelope in the region. They "see talks of any kind as opportunities to push new demands on the table so they can demand more in the future and force a compromise on something that was not identified as an issue in the first place."

¶10. (C) Such animosity had a direct impact on NATO policy. NATO obligations notwithstanding, Greece's "primary need," in Spiliotopoulos' view, was for troops ready to face "a tactical army like the Turk." With 1,400 men serving abroad in various missions, Greece had reached the "absolute limit" of what it was able to do without risking its own defense. NATO transformation, he said, was an important goal, but it could only be pursued within the context of Greece's overarching defensive policy against Turkey. Deputy director of the MFA D2 Directorate for NATO Theodoros Daskarolis succinctly summed up this position. "If you could guarantee us protection against the Turks," Daskarolis said, "we could do a lot more in Afghanistan and on NATO transformation."

COMMENT

¶11. (C) When it comes to cooperation in the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean, Greece has been forthcoming, meeting specific requests for military assistance. Examples include Greek support for the USN facility at Souda Bay and Greece's generous offer on CFE entitlement transfers. Our challenge, however, remains getting the Greeks to look beyond their immediate neighborhood and to recognize their own interests in NATO's broader strategic agenda. Our goal is to get Greece to embrace genuine Alliance internationalism that sees issues such as NATO transformation not as burdens imposed from without but as self-generated imperatives.
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